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EXTRA SATURDAY

MONTREAL DIARY

BACKING from the tracks

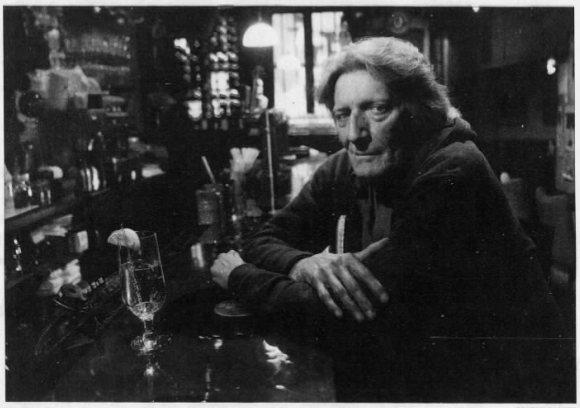
A program offered by Via Rail has allowed artists like Montrealer Corey Gulkin to save money on transportation while entertaining passengers. Page B4

OPINION

PET PEEVES? They're awesome

When Watchwords columnist Mark Abley asked readers for their complaints about vocabulary, grammar and the general misuse of English, a tired word emerged as the dubious winner. Page H5

LONGTIME GAZETTE CONTRIBUTOR ***JUAN RODRIGUEZ*** *has enjoyed a lifelong love affair with music, and a vantage point on rock 'n' roll that few listeners – or even critics – have experienced. Before the concert industry became a well-oiled machine, Juan found himself with enviable access to some of the biggest names to pass through Montreal, as well as some of the city's brightest stars. In this seven-part weekly series, he looks back at the moments that stand out in his career — not always for the right reasons — beginning with this week's recollection of his formative influences. Look for subsequent instalments of Juan Rodriguez's Rock 'n' Roll Life in the Saturday Culture section, and for additional features at* ***montrealgazette.com/rocknroll***



JOHN KENNEY/THE GAZETTE

Juan Rodriguez takes a seat at Upstairs Jazz Bar and Grill last week. As a teenager in the mid-1960s, Rodriguez was in awe of the pop music spreading across the radio dial. The multitude of sounds represented more than a revolution in his personal life – it would trigger a determination to make music his professional focus.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ'S ROCK 'N' ROLL LIFE

Story by JUAN RODRIGUEZ Special to The Gazette

THE EPIPHANY OCCURRED ONE NIGHT IN SEPTEMBER 1964, when I placed my father's Telefunken reel-to-reel tape recorder next to the kitchen radio and self-consciously made a document of musical times a-changin' as I turned the dial from station to station.

At night you could catch American stations with mind-blowingly clear reception; Boston and New York often came in clear as a bell. But clarity wasn't necessarily the objective. Static and fuzz, due to sudden shifts in wind or interference from other power sources, only added to the authenticity of the moment, of great distances bridged by the discovery of a new and exciting spirit of sound. This dial-turning was my first intensely interior listening experience, sounds colliding like atoms inside my head.

The airwaves were dense with exploding pop music — supercharged, magic. The Beatles led the blitz with A Hard Day's Night: the movie of the same name premièred in theatres the previous month. (I stayed for two screenings.) Their hits from earlier in the year — and from late 1963, when they topped the British charts while Americans mourned JFK with teen pop — were now being played as oldies alongside the current releases. The Stones' Tell Me was beginning a slow fade off the charts — it always sounded like it was fading in and out of the ozone anyway, with its dissonant harmonies and echoed tambourine — replaced by their spanking cover of Bobby Womack's R&B classic It's All Over Now.

I often confused the Shangri-Las' Remember (Walkin' in the Sand), with its seagull sound effects and haunting fadeout ("the night was so exciting ... smile was so inviting"), with the Ronettes' Walking in the Rain, with its dramatic thunderclap beginning. (The latter group — which I'd read about in Tom Wolfe's portrait The First Tycoon of Teen, published in the New York Herald Tribune — spurred my weekly search for 45s on producer Phil Spector's label Philles, featuring his famous Wall of Sound.)

The Animals' The House of the Rising Sun was instantly recognizable, its syncopated guitar-and-bass intro booming as if the radio station had turned the volume up a notch. Many stations played the extended version, which included a snaky, rococo organ solo. (When CFCF DJ Dave Boxer dissed the Animals for the song's length, and ran an essay contest for opinions pro and con, I won. "Very articulate," muttered Dave.) Roy Orbison had a similar "listen to this" opening guitar grabber — we didn't use the term "riff" until a year or two later — on Oh, Pretty Woman.

Please see RODRIGUEZ, Page B2

ROCK 'N' ROLL LIFE ONLINE

Each week, we'll be posting content on our website and mobile apps to accompany this series. Look for weekly video interviews with Juan Rodriguez, playlists (available on the website only) related to each week's instalment, a forum for readers to submit their own rock 'n' roll stories, and more. Check back often at **montrealgazette.com/rocknroll**

PAUL TAILLEFER/MONTREAL STAR COLLECTION

Critical listening: Juan Rodriguez in 1972.

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